Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat *Inc*

June 2000

Making a stand: protesters attempt to block access to a state forest.

The RFA, its all over now! Or is it?

More area set aside for wildlife. Logging quotas reduced but employment guaranteed, then we hear of quotas deferred fo 2 years, logging in SPZ at Trentham, WFS member chaining himself inside premiers car .....etc

Picture from the Weekly Times, April 5, 2000

DIARY DATES

Fri 2nd June. Meeting. *Mycology, fungi and fungimapping.* Speaker Martine Paull, Mycology Department, National Herbarium, Melbourne.

Sun 4th June. Excursion. *Rivers of Gold.* Leader Claire Dalman.

Wed 7th June. Excursion. *Lamplough, south of Avoca.* Hopefully to view the pygmy possums etc. Leaders Pat and Bill Murphy.

Fri 16th - Sun 18th June. *Club Campout, Apollo Bay.* "Star of the Sea Convent", Noel Street, VICROADS 264C10, Leader John Mildren.

Tues 27th June. *Committee Meeting.* Greg and Genny's, , 7-30pm.

Fri 7th July. Meeting. *Members' Night.* Short talks by club members.

Sun 9th July. Excursion. *Wombat Forest - a focus on fungi.* Leader Brian Andrews.

MAY MEETING POINTS

*1 Apollo Bay Campout, cost hopefully $10/ head/ night. *2 Ideas requested for our 50 year booklet. *3 Reports of logging in a Special Protection Zone in the Wombat Forest at Trentham. *4 Talk of a National Park being created between the Little Desert and Portland. *5 A summary of the RFA given by John Gregurke. *6 Bob Curtain gave treasurer's report. *7 The book "Flora of Melbourne" donated by Dulcie Brooke. *8 The club's CD ROM of Lake Wendouree has gone missing from the storage cupboard, information requested regarding its whereabouts.

FIELD REPORTS

In a tiny puddle in a wheel rut the following bathed and/or drank in the space of 3 minutes: a pair of scarlet robins, a family of striated thornbills, an eastern spinebill, a white-throated tree-creeper and superb blue wrens. Beaufort-Mt Lonarch Road, 23rd April. Eastern rosellas dropping acorns from tree, La Gerche Walk, Creswick, Carol Hall. Thirty yellow - tailed black cockatoos roosting in trees, Lal Lal, 11th April, Les Hanrahan. Swans mating, Buninyong Gong, 15th April, Kevin Andrews. Three wedge-tailed eagles, over our garden, Durham Lead, 24th April, Joan Andrews. Honey fungi: *Armillaria luteobubalina and Gymnopilus pampeanus,* also inky caps *Coprinus atramentarius* and shaggy ink caps *Coprinus comatus,* around Lake Wendouree, mid April, Brian Andrews. Purple crowned lorikeets, flocks of 30+, flame robins, male and female, juveniles parties

of six. Golden whistler, male. Many eastern rosellas, long billed corellas and red-rumped parrots, Merrin Merrin State Game Reserve, 5th April, Greg Binns. Pair of galahs, also as previous - ink caps and other large fungi in cluster. Moorhen with damaged leg and protection behaviour. Black swans display behaviour. Lake Wendouree, 5th May, Peter Billing. Visited Cape Otway lighthouse and Mait's Rest, cool temperate rainforest. Magnificent coastline in early morning and unexpected delights of rainforest so close to the coast. 25th April, Margaret Tonkin. Graceful parasol fungi, *Macrolepiota konradii*, (originally reported as a shaggy ink cap), in vegetable garden, Wendouree, 4th May, John Gregurke. Red garden orb spider and big underground frog, Meredith. Red whiskered bul buls etc, Sydney, Lyndsay Fink. Red browed finches back in garden now, absent at times, Mount Helen, Avis Barlow. Robins perching on garden stakes, Creswick, Ken McDonnell. Four day walk Bay of Fires, draught board shark egg case etc. Mount William Park, NW Tasmania, shearwaters dazzled by lighthouse and then fly into it, Dulcie Brooke. Correas and banksias excellent at the moment. Pat Murphy reported "Hotfoot" being used on city buildings and asked what effect it would have on the peregrine falcons, Lyndsay Fink replied that it had only been used on the hands of the town hall clock to stop starlings roosting on the hands and stopping movement.

A STUDY OF BLACK SWANS

Ken Kraaijeveld, a PhD student from Melbourne University was our May speaker. Ken started by giving an overview of the swan species of the world from our black swans to the intermediate black-necked swans of South America and finally the various white swan species of the northern hemisphere. He also showed the coscoroba which has characteristics intermediate between swans and geese. Ken explained the evolution of swans and showed an artist's impression of the now extinct NZ swan, which was bigger and stockier than our black swan. He also mentioned that Malta at one time had a giant swan.

The first report of black swans from a white person came from the Dutch explorer Willem de Vlamingh. Apart from the obvious differences in plumage etc there are quite a few differences between black swans and the European mute swan ie with the black swans both sexes incubate the eggs whereas only the female mute incubates the eggs. Black swans are colonial but with the mute, colonies are rare. Breeding is mostly seasonal with the black but it is always seasonal with the mute. Black swans are sedentary or nomadic but the mutes are

sedentary or migratory. It is suspected that blacks are monogamous but mutes form long term pairs. It has been claimed that black swans are homosexual but Ken knows of no evidence to support this - except for birds in captivity, which is not a natural situation.

At this stage Ken moved on to the topic of sexual selection. In many species the dominant male, through strength or attractiveness (which is probably a measure of health) gets to mate with many females, which are usually plain, this means that his superior genes are passed on to the maximum number of offspring. A drawback of this arrangement is that the male is unable to care for all of his offspring. In the bird world the female American red-winged blackbirds are attracted to the males with the brightest wing patches, and these males have the greatest mating success. Our female fairy wrens are quite crafty they pair up with a suitable male to raise the chicks and then they go off to mate with all the good looking males - "the milkman principle"! In birds which are monogamous, mutual sexual selection is predominant, the sexes are similar and the male selects the female as much as the female selects the male. Ken showed whiskered auklets which are an example of this, the sexes being similar and both were ornamented. Crested auklets were another example and it was suspected that selection was based on the size of the crest, so some birds had their crests trimmed while other birds had their crests enlarged with the trimmings - and the birds with the enlarged crests had the greatest mating success! At the moment Ken is conducting a similar experiment with our swans, the curly tertiary wing feathers are used for display and it is thought that mating success depends on the number and size of these feathers, so Ken is catching bachelor birds and trimming and transplanting some of the feathers.

Ken gave examples of swan behaviour including one which tourists thought was mating but was in fact an argument! All of the swans caught have been DNA tested, this can show many things including the sex of the bird and the parents of cygnets. One surprise was the perfect parent, which on its own reared 7 wonderful cygnets, near McArthur St - it turned out to be a male! Another interesting fact obtained from DNA testing was that the % of male cygnets was close to 50% at Lake Wendouree and French Island but only 15% at Reedy Lake - which was hard to explain!

Ken showed some of Carol's slides including me catching a swan, Ken measuring a swan and John and Ken paddling John's canoe while searching for nests. This brings me to the final point that Ken is always appreciative of help! BDA

THE EXCURSION TO LEXTON

Tracing the trail of the early settlers was the theme of the May excursion, enhanced by being joined by Vicki Gardener who provided everyone with a list of birds found in the area, Geraldine Smith who is active in landcare and by Margaret and Harry Oulton. Margaret wrote the history of Lexton "A Valley of the Finest Description", published in 1985 for Victoria's 150 years celebration and available at the Lexton shops and from the Pyrinees Shire Offices.

Lexton was first settled in 1928 and was formerly called Burnbank (burn is Scottish for a stream). It stands at the point where Major Mitchell's route returning from Portland to Sydney crosses that of settlers travelling from Tasmania, via Geelong, to the Wimmera. It became an important centre for provisioning squatters and miners (the canny Scots knew there was more money in this than in gold mining) and it became an administrative centre before the first gold discoveries.

We drove into the town, down the Toll Bar Hill and began our walking tour, following the pamphlet available at the nearby shop, at the Toll Bar Park. This was a Cobb & Co staging post and is across what is now the main Sunraysia Highway from the Pyrinees Hotel. This was established as the Burnbank Hotel and store in 1845, by David and Janet Anderson, my great-great grandparents.

The large Public Hall, now owned by the community, was originally the Doctor's Creek School and was moved in to Lexton in 1848. Opposite the hall is a large but shabby timber house called "Sunnyside". It was built by David & Janet Anderson.

We saw the Lexton School, which the day before our visit had celebrated its 125 years. There are 10 pupils there and 1.4 teachers! Lucky Lexton! Near the school was the St Andrew's Presbyterian Church which still operates, and whose 150 years celebrations I attended last November.

After lunch at the Toll Bar Park we drove, via a very good example of a canoe tree, to the cemetery on the road to Talbot, being winter there were few flowers out, although an exception was the bright pink oxalis flower. There were a lot of very old graves, including that of David & Janet Anderson, & a large allottment belonged to the Robertson family of Mt Mitchell Estate.

Harry Oulton led us on a back route to the town via the site of the Presbyterian manse, built in 1847, but destroyed by fire in 1870. We wondered why the Presbyterian minister was "exiled" so far out of town!

Near the Public Hall is Rifle Range Road which Harry led us along & into the bush, returning by the same route as he

didn't want us to get lost.

I have yet to find the road which the procession of people in 19th Century clothes, old vehicle & animals followed the re-enactment walk held to celebrate the 150 years of Lexton in 1995. I walked in the rain with a lady leading a sheep!

Eileen Anderson

Brian asked me to write the report of what birds and plants we saw - big mistake. I was so fascinated listening to past history that natural history didn't register much and no binoculars didn't help. We did see beautiful, mature eucalypts about town, a reasonable array of fungi and quite a few birds. Fungi included shaggy caps (apparently edible), puff balls, mushrooms, honey fungus *Armillaria luteobubalina* and several varieties of toadstools. Birds included Restless Fly Catcher, Willy Wagtail, Magpie, Forktail Swifts, Spinetail Swifts, Plovers, Welcome Swallow, Galahs, Thornbill, Crimson Rosellas, wrens, Robin -probably scarlet, Red-rumped Parrots, and doubtless more which I didn't see. Our bush stroll revealed few flowers - really just one *Correa reflexa* in brilliant colour. Growing on a black wattle was Witches Broom - a bacterial infection which puzzled most of us as did some strange , drooping branches on a eucalypt - normal colour but distinctly "weeping" growth. The day was interesting and certainly made me see Lexton as more than I previously had - just a town to pass through en route to somewhere else. Thanks Eileen and all visiting leaders.

Claire Dalman

THE GHOSTS OF NANANOOK.

Mt Beckworth was known to the local aborigines as "Nananook". Helen took us there for our mid-month excursion to see the *Correa glabra* plants that grow on an extension to the original reserve. The extension was obtained by Stella Bedggood as compensation for crown land in Canadian Forest being aquired to build Mt Clear Secondary College.

The extension is at the southern end of the range. As soon as we got out of the cars we saw rooting shank fungi, striated pardalotes were calling and flowering correas were noticed. John found the remains of a bird which he concluded was a tawny frogmouth. Kevin amused himself rock-rolling and found two large scorpions with young, further rock-rolling convinced us that the underside of just about every rock was home to a family of scorpions.

We eventually found the correas, Jim Willis had concluded that they appeared to be *Correa glabra* with strains of *Correa reflexa*. Coming back we were surprised to find a patch of

liverwort in what seemed a rather exposed position. Claire also found masses of ghost fungus. Arriving back at the parking spot we were surprised to see Eileen and Maureen, who left the correa site before the rest of us, still there. Eileen had managed to get stuck on a mound of soil!

Heading for the dam at the northern end of the range we stopped along Fentons Rd to view a Whistling Kite, a wedge-tailed eagle, a kestrel and Brown Falcons. We had a pleasant afternoon near the dam and Pat kept us busy trying to identify the "native tree mice" she had seen, which we eventually concluded were pygmy possums and we can hopefully see next month. Also a piece of the ghost fungus is still glowing in my office, 5 days after being picked! BDA

APRIL POSER...SUN LOVERS.

Lyndsay answered the how part as follows:- "It is an automatic adjustment made by the plant as it grows, though the plant's movements are different from ours they have the same result, they change the position of the individual concerned and so maintain its shape. When one side of the plant is in the shade, a growth hormone, called an auxin, from the Greek to grow, moves to the darker side causing it to grow much faster, as a result the stem bends towards the source of light, the sun. Some plants are attracted to the sun so strongly that they begin their day facing East and finish facing West. In a vast field of sunflowers, where literally thousands of blooms follow the sun, it is far too dramatic to go unnoticed".

When I aired the problem at the Herbarium lunchtable it was suggested that maybe the heat produced by the sunlight increased transpiration in the section facing the sun, this would result in less fluid and therefore less pressure in that section of the stem and the flower head would rotate towards that direction as a result.

However both of the above theories have drawbacks, for instance it would seem to me that both mechanisms would result in a bending of the stem rather than a rotation of the flower head. There is also the fact that neither theory explains why some flowers follow the sun but others don't.

As for the question why, there seems to be two obvious answers (i) it produces a pollination advantage - when the flower is facing the sun it will be warmer and the warmth will increase the activity of insects visiting the plant, enhancing the probability of pollination. Also (ii) the increased light level and resulting heat will aid any chemical processes taking place in the flower ie development of seed.

Please let me know if you have any better ideas! BDA

MAY POSER...THOSE NEWSLETTERS.

I didn't get any responses to my enquiry for May 1975 or February 1976 newsletters. This didn't surprise me because Edith Fry was editor at the time and she told me that she missed out on producing two issues. However I remember an article in a previous newsletter stating that two issues were missed and I managed to find one of the those supposedly missed! ... So I was just hoping! Roger Thomas, along with Peter Fry, produced the first club newsletter in May 1974, and apart from the two issues mentioned above, we have had a newsletter each month (except February) ever since. With the newsletter being produced for 26 years and with 11 copies a year and most copies having 8 pages we have an information resource of over 2000 pages! Maybe one day, some gallant person(s) with a bit of spare time will produce an index of the contents!

BDA

JUNE POSER...BILL'S SALVATION

Bill has asked me not to put any more crossword puzzles in the newsletter - no work is done in the Murphy household until Pat has solved the puzzle! With this in mind Kevin has helped me construct the word search puzzle below:-

A	E	L	A	S	I	L	S
T	R	D	Y	T	I	A	E
P	A	A	A	C	A	R	S
C	A	O	U	M	A	S	L
L	A	L	Y	O	I	H	H
P	R	D	P	B	L	N	D
C	A	R	I	V	I	T	S
W	L	R	P	F	I	E	K

1st letter from 1st column, 2nd from 2nd etc, Use each letter only once.

See if you can find...1. Fish eating birds 2. A type of gold insect 3. Pigeons Milk 4. A dotty crustacean 5. NSW floral emblems 6. A tasty 7. An organism which lives on another 8. And what's left?

Kevin and BDA

---------***---------- FNCB ----------***----------

Meetings are held at the Ballarat Horticulture centre, corner of Gregory and Gillies Streets, ie. the NW corner of the Botanic Gardens, VICROADS 254 P8, commencing at 7-30pm

Excursions depart from Creswick Plaza, VICROADS 255 M10, at 9-30 am, unless specified otherwise.

Committee; Claire Dalman (President).. , Greg Binns (Vice President).. , John Gregurke (Secretary).. , Bob Curtain , Brian Andrews (Editor).. , Helen Burgess, Maureen Christie, Lyndsay Fink, Carol Hall, John Mildren, Pat Murphy.

Postal Address: PO Box 328M, Ballarat West, 3350 Inc Reg No A0014919P